

**Column:****Column: Grace notes**

# GRACE

## NOTES XVI

**DR SALMA SIDDIQUE** asks what are the implications of what happens in the community for us in the therapy room?

**A**S THERAPISTS WE are ethnographers venturing and engaging into the (un)known places through the act of storymaking (Siddique, 2012). We do this through the experience of 'being there' and through making sense of ego states, life scripts and notions of 'I'm OK, you're OK', (Berne, 1958). In the telling of their stories our clients are influenced by the events unfolding around them. So what are the implications of what happens in the community – and our understanding of it – for us in the therapy room? How do we work with the journey between the attachment of 'here' and the detachment of 'there'? The refugees/migrants and asylum seekers who are in transition illuminate the challenges in working with cultural changes. How might photography help us?

Photography is a powerful medium telling visually the stories of our place and events in the world. The image offers an interpersonal relationship with proximity and distance as a sense-making aide memoir. For Feldman (1991) 'the event is not what happens... the event is that which can be narrated' (p14). So what is this narrative and how can we use this visual literacy which recognises relationships and moves beyond the focus of the single frame? The act of taking pictures could be a dialogical tool which speaks, documents and makes available the diverse, the overlooked, silenced, rejected and marginalised story (Singhal and Devi, 2003).

According to Eisenstaedt (2014), 'all photographers have to do, is find and catch the story-telling moment.' One powerful example of this is the photograph by Dogan Haber Ajansı of the lifeless body of three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on a holiday beach. But there are many ways this can be viewed and used. O'Neill, a journalist with the *Spectator* magazine, argued that 'the global spreading of this snapshot ... is justified as a way of raising awareness about the migrant crisis. Please. It's more like a snuff photo for progressives, dead-child porn, designed not to start a serious debate about migration in the 21st century but to elicit a self-satisfied feeling of sadness among Western observers.' Even such a tragic story as Alan's which reflects a community of

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despair can fall into public apathy. Little has changed to realise the utopian ideal of Peck (1998) of a community movement which at its heart reclaims the 'personal principles of tolerance and loving kindness emerging through communities of care, responsibility, vulnerability, trust and cultural inclusiveness of citizens of the world'. How far down the road have we gone to fully realise: 'I'm OK (only when) You're OK'?

The refugees/migrants are fleeing from injury, poverty, conflict and their own private hell of being left with nothing. They find themselves caught within a liminal state – the shared experience of which gives meaning to the unstructured state of *communitas*. This allows a sense of belonging. That place in the world is (re) told in a grand narrative which may be outside of their awareness or as a partial truth based on making meaning and relating to their cultural surroundings (Schwartz, 1993) through individual experience contributing to the collective memory. This cultural world becomes very significant in their relationships (Drego, 1983).

So how can we acknowledge this story of fleeing and question the notions of community and social justice? These stories of loss and attachment enter the therapy room with the client's narrative in the form of a collage of moments; and as a community of therapists we are obliged to reclaim social justice, human rights and forgiveness in the unfolding story. As TA therapists we can do this through the dialogue of reflection and interpretation to shape *physis* (Clarkeson, 1998). We can begin by acknowledging the refugees' needs for aspiration (Cornell, 2010) where, in terms of resilience, people seek autonomy through self-expression and participatory methods to make sense of early developmental stages to inform 'protocols' which support the emergence of an awareness of attitudes and beliefs. The relational patterns give voice to the 'script work' which is co-created through fragments of text, sound and image in stories which resonate with the lived and early relationships.

The messages that the photo gives of vulnerability, resilience, disappearance and hope in the case of the imagery in the journey of refugees is not that dissimilar to those of our clients. Although we may question its media purpose and the subsequent reaction from the world community, the image remains powerful and challenges us as therapists about our role as part of a community, as well as in our individual response to images and stories.

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